

TJC Touchstone

Spring 1992



WANT TO FIND SOME SPICE FOR YOUR LIFE?

To Students and Staff of Tyler Junior College:

The TJC TOUCHSTONE

ANNOUNCES THE THEME FOR THE 1992-1993

EDITION:

THE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

--Explore your world through short stories, poems, essays, photographs, and artwork with "The Voyage of Discovery" in mind.

--Journey to J104 for guidelines for submission for publication. Yes, you can be the captain of your own creativity!

--Submit your works anytime between May 1, 1992, and December, 1993.

Bon Voyage!

Passages

WIFE OF
S. TARRANT
DIED
MAY 21. 1889
AGED
56 YEARS

VIEW ME TRAVELER
AS YOU PASS BY.
AS YOU ARE NOW
SO ONCE WAS I.
AS I AM NOW SO
YOU MUST BE.
SO PREPARE TO
FOLLOW ME.

Foreword

Spring 1992 marks the seventh edition of the *TJC Touchstone*. The staff and sponsors thank our contributors. Each entry, expressive in its own way, was worthy of publication. Unfortunately, due to limited space, not all were published. In the tradition of the *Touchstone*, each entry was anonymously critiqued by seven readers.

This year's theme "Passages," is an ideal one. For thousands of years, women and men have tried to grasp this elusive topic.

In reality, the college student has a better grasp of the emotions involved with passing from one state to another than any famous author. At no other time in life are we so bombarded by change. We are separated from our parents, forced to think responsibly and make decisions that will affect our lives. We leave the sheltered world of childhood friends and often meet the person we will spend the rest of our life with.

Perhaps no entry has the technical merit to rival Poe or Shakespeare, but all contributors have expressed, in the best way they know, the pain and the ecstasy of life's passages.

We hope you enjoy the 1991-92 *Touchstone*. . .

Jeremy Coe
Editor-in-chief



SHINING THROUGH by Kristi Thorn

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Spring, 1992

About the title:

A distinctive streak left on a black touchstone when rubbed with genuine silver or gold was a foolproof test which allowed ancient civilizations to trust using coins in trade. We trust that you, too, will find genuine distinctive elements of value in the TJC Touchstone.

Carolyn Hendon
March 1986



This edition of *TJC Touchstone*
is printed on recycled paper.

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RIPPLES IN THE SAND by Teresa Ann Barecky

Passages of Time

by Teresa Ann Barecky

Time is as fluid as the tide,
moving, renewing, always thrusting forward,
dancing on the winds of change.
Like a thief in the night, life consumes,
its hunger never ending.
The reality of loneliness is a crescendo of emotions,
rocking the soul of mankind,
like the tide crashing upon the deserted shore.
Its only companion is the shadow it casts upon the sands.
The future lies before us like a heavy veil draped across the
dawning of a new day.
The days turn to nights, the months turn to years,
years into a lifetime.
A lifetime of choices,
to live, to love, to be loved,
or a lifetime of loneliness and regrets.
The currents of life continue flowing, steadily eroding,
forever beckoning, changing directions along the way.
Love transcends all life and time,
it tames the restless waters of change,
with the hope of a passage to a new tomorrow.

My Son's Bad Dreams, and Angel Swords

by Rick Diamond

It would be wrong to say that my son is afraid of the dark. He is not afraid of the dark; he doesn't become fearful or clingy when we turn out his lights and shut his door. He isn't particularly fearful that dark creatures will come to eat him in his bed, or, as I was, of giant cockroaches and shiny reptiles from under his bed which will eat off any foot or hand which wanders off the edge and out of the covers in the night. But every once in a while, something will trigger something dark in one of his deep places, and for a week or so, he will be unwilling to go into any room alone, day or night. After a while, this will stop, on its own, usually without my wife's and my noticing.

And yet, even though they only rarely creep into his room, I want to be able to stop my son's bad dreams when they come. I tell him again and again when I need to (it's a rehearsed speech, we've said it so many times—and let's face it, it was a speech I learned in childhood), "It's okay, there's nothing to be afraid of, there's nothing in the darkness that isn't there in the daytime. There's no such thing as monsters."

For a while, we even tried another approach: "The dark is magic, Alex, when you see things differently than you do in the daytime, you get to see the moon, and the stars, which are always there, even in the daytime, but we don't get to see them until it gets dark—isn't that cool?" He doesn't buy it. "I think I'd like to see the sun right now," he says, his big eyes widening a little when I turn the lights out in his room at the ghastly hour of eight-thirty. In the summer, it isn't even dark out, but that doesn't seem to matter.

And, because my wife and I believe in angels, we try that

approach, too: "Let's say a prayer, and angels will be here in the room with you, taking care of you." That was a mistake, opening a theological discussion with a four-year-old just before bedtime. "Who sends the angels, Daddy?" he asks. Before I finish sputtering out some answer I think will satisfy a four-year-old, he asks, "Where to the angels live, Daddy?" So I start talking about Heaven and he says, "I've never seen an angel, Daddy?" I tell him everything I can think of about angels, and the one detail he picks up on is the fact that in some stories, angels carry swords. He likes that. But, finally, looking thoughtful, he decides, "I don't believe in angels, Daddy. I can't see them." So I answer, "You believe in Jesus, don't you? And you've never seen Him." That night, when Mama turns out the light and they have wish time, Alex wishes that God and Jesus would come down from Heaven and let him see them. "And an angel too, please," he adds.

I suspect that at the deepest place, in secret, a secret from him as well as from the rest of us, my son knows that I can't really protect him from evil or pain or suffering. I can warn him a lot, in that hideous barking way parents do, and I can teach him about how not to get hurt, and I can hold his hand when we cross the street and when it's dark outside.

But I can't keep bad dreams from coming every now and then—the dreams that wake us all up as Alex screams from his bed. They only come once in a great while, after a long weekend or a scary part in a movie (something with a witch or a wolf). And they go away on their own. And perhaps that's what I sense—I run into his room and hold him and stroke his head and tell him it's okay, and say a

prayer over him, and rock him back to sleep. But the dreams will come back with a will of their own, regardless of what I say. They will come when they wish to, and leave only when they're done. Just as I can't always be there to catch him before he trips and hits the ground, I cannot keep evil out of my son's world.

The world was not, as I sometimes egocentrically imagine, a safer place when I was a child. It's proper in this last decade of the twentieth century to say that the world is going to hell and that things were better when we were young and things were simpler, but in reality I suspect things were just as scary but I didn't see them because I was a child. And yet, saying that makes me realize that, although my comforts are not omnipotent and my arms are fallible human arms, I was safe once upon a time, or I felt so, in my mother's arms.

So I hug my son often, and kiss him, and look into his eyes, and pray over him, and watch him, and tell him he is loved and he is beautiful and he is going to live a long time and have a wonderful life.

Trouble will come soon enough. In the meantime, I'll slip an angel sword into my son's belt while he isn't looking.

Resistance and Its Peace

by Rick Diamond

I dreamed last night my daughter died.
My muffled sleep kept me from finding her; I looked all through our dark,
uninhabited house, which was
not ours, but was (in that dream way);
It couldn't be—my baby dead?
No one had said a thing to me,
yet somehow I could hear them talking;
I cried hard, as I seldom
do in real life; got on the phone
or asked the neighbors, ran in place,
(the way you do in dreams), screamed, ran,
until I stood in a dark, stale room
in the ancient parlored funeral home
in Mom's hometown, ages ago—
from the open coffin, through the
mourners, my bright pink girl waved "hi"
to me (no one saw her alive
but me—I felt alone among
their bowed, tear-stained faces), but unconvincing, I ran through halls and halls
I'd never known, asking, choking,
"Where is Caitlin?" Their answers came:
a funeral, like Granddaddy's
when I sat among crying women,
a boy without a father near—
I recognized the process, saw
the line of crying faces, heard
some music and some words, but I
could not see Catie—she hadn't come.
And yet their answers to my cries
(that sobbing dreams afford) came still:
"She's dead. lie back, be quiet—she's dead.
You'll be okay. Sit down." But I—
I only heard my heart beat fast
and I shook my head and ran harder.
When I woke up, my wife was near and warm.
The heater had decided to work. I saw
a pile of papers still to grade beside
my cluttered head. I raised up, listened—and
from across my tear streaked cheeks I heard *her*—
my daughter's baby-breathing in her room.
The music of the spheres rocked me to sleep.

To J and J

by Judy Turman

Eighteen and sixteen . . .
Tall, tan, straight, strong . . .
Anxious to be free . . .

I remember two soft
Clusters of simple circles
Who revolved around me.

Changes

by Sarah Bennett

The winds of time blow—
Changes—the once babe in arms—
Now is a man grown . . .



SERENITY by Lisa Camp

Sonnet on Faith

by Gloria Davis

Wrapped tight and dark, the caterpillar waits
and trusts the surging power within his soul
to bring his body to its final goal
and give him wings to flee the prison gates.
Unnoticed the acorn falls to the ground
and is covered with compost dank and dark.
It lies waiting unaware of its mark
to grow stalwart and tall without a sound.
Screaming protests and cursing the darkness,
a man resists the power that controls him,
Wrenching from life—hope—no matter how dim.
More anguished life results in living less.
Submission is not equal to failure;
in God's scheme triumph finally is sure.

Memories Of Little Ones

by Keith Mathis

The judge set down his gavel
and said that we were through
our old car he gave to me,
and our kids he gave to you

I commend him for his judgment
because it's hard enough for me
to take care of myself
much less take care of three

Memories of little ones
make tears come to my eyes
everytime I hear
the happy laughter of a child

Memories of little ones
run my heart right through
everytime I see a child
with golden hair
and your pale eyes of blue

It was a year ago today
that the judge passed down his rule
I hope the kids are doing fine
and doing well in school

I can't wait until the day
that I'll see them once again
Once a month is not enough
for the love I have for them

Memories of little ones
make tears come to my eyes
everytime I hear
the happy laughter of a child.

Teen View

by Marilyn Bright

I took another pill today.
It really sent me on my way.
All my friends think I'm great.
A top ten is what I rate.

Today is real important to me.
One more pill to help me see.
Everything must go just right,
To help us teens in this fight.

We have rights as teens today.
To do things our own way.
Popping pills, smoking
crack and pot,
Can't really harm you a lot.

Things are going really fine.
There's my friends standing in line.
They are waiting just for me,
A few more pills is what I need.

Hey, c'mon, move out of the way,
Don't they know this is my day.
What's this? What did they say?
Someone's dead! Who will pay?

But!! How can this be?
Drugs don't kill! They help you see.
You can't really die,
Just from trying to get high.

My friends are standing all around,
Someone lying on the ground.
Turn her over, let me see.
Who, this little fool can be.

Who can it be!
Oh! God!
It's . . . Me.

Life Goes On

by Kimberly Bradshaw

I try to think to the exact moment it happened, the day of realization toward life's finality. So much has happened since to move the memory further and further into the file marked "forgotten." Yet, in a way, it seems like just yesterday when the profound realization that people, in general, tell other people that "Life goes on," actually hit.

It seemed like I had been packing forever, filling the recycled cardboard boxes with various tokens of memories of days long gone. The faded pictures of a little girl in a pink-flowered granny-bonnet sitting affectionately in the lap of a young, handsome man, seemed to be calling to me. Picking up the photo, I noticed, again, that the man was wearing grey work-

clothes. His shirt was dotted with oil. Scanning, I saw his heavy, steel-toed boots, rigid and scuffed on the tops. His hands were dirty with oil and grime. The man's hard, calloused hands were gently placed around the chubby waist of the bright-eyed little girl, as though to protect her.

Another photo, of the same child, turns up, only this time, the

little girl is standing on a table. Yet again the light pink color appears on her simple dress. But, the child appears to be wobbling to the right, and, there to keep her balanced, is a hand. Attached to the delicate hand is a lovely young lady. The lady is looking at the child with a caring smile, one only a mother could have for her baby, or for her "Baby-cakes" in this case.

As I gazed, for what seemed to be years, at these two rectangles of life long past, I flashed back to all the small memories of my little

near-perfect world. I remembered the times the beautiful woman and I made cookies, and I always ended up licking the spoon. I remembered times when the handsome young man would wrestle me to the floor and tickle my ribs until I was blue in the face from laughter.

As I faded out of my hypnotic state of remembrance, a strange feeling hit me. I was in the process of leaving these two people who had protected me all of my life. I was leaving my near-perfect little world with them.

"It is just another part of

growing up," a voice within my mind stated to me. "You can always move back, Kim-baby," the melodious voice of my mother chimed.

And my thoughts trickled down my cheeks onto the frozen moments. It was at this point that I realized and knew that things would never be the same. Yes, my family would always be there for me and I could always come back. But, it was time for me to move on and to make a life for myself. I was always told that life goes on. But, no one ever told me it would change forever.

Grandmother

by Marilyn Bright

Her world was complete in the church,
As she sat in the pew,
All her grandchildren sitting around her.
She would smile and press a gentle hand
Upon our lip if we made a sound.

She often said amen,
To express her joy and faith.
A faith so strong that through it all,
Trials and tribulations would not be her downfall.

Holding the family together was her greatest hope.
But the days passed and the grandchildren grew.
Then a lone solitary figure sat in the pew.

When the faith was ignited,
The amens still came
Although weaker now from the passage of time.
The new generation thought this rude and annoying.

An old woman's faith meant nothing.
Her joy of living and expressing her love
Was not understood by this new breed of Christians.

Now the pew is empty.
The church service quiet.
No one need worry that the gentle voice will crack.
No more amens breaking the silence.
A choir sings, a sermon is heard,

A grandmother says amen no more.

Life Cycles

by Sarah Bennett

Life can be suppressed
no more—Winter must give way—
Leaves burst forth in joy . . .

A single peach tree
fooled by the warm winter sun,
resplendent in pink.

by Elaine Graybill

Climbing Moonshine Hill

by Charline Wallis

We were five friends, talking and laughing with each other while climbing Moonshine Hill on our bikes. It was easy as pie, no sweat. To climb Moonshine Hill, you just keep going, using more imagination than muscle. The people who gave that name to this broad expanse of Texas riverside land, dotted with pines and oilfields and oaks dripping with Spanish moss, were also pretty imaginative. The moonshine part was true. We might have thought it meant romantic moonlight nights for some of the older kids, because a favorite "parking" spot was out here somewhere. More likely, the name was given a couple of decades before, during Prohibition, alluding to somebody's home brew. But it must have been some stretch of imagination that attached the word "hill" to a rise in elevation so slight that we wouldn't have changed gears on our bikes even if they'd had gears.

My bicycle, a lucky secondhand buy from a neighbor, didn't even have balloon tires like the other girls'. But my joy in being mobile helped me subdue my embarrassment over that difference. At least it was painted a pretty blue and had a wicker basket on the handlebars. On trips to the grocery store for my mother, my dog rode in the basket, to be replaced by groceries for his trot back home.

Our goal at Moonshine Hill was the home of a classmate—a specific, capsulized destination. Other mysteries existed along the winding roads, and still farther on lay the San Jacinto River. Thinking logically now, there must have been a downhill stretch leading to the river, but in that flat country, who noticed?

Growing up in Humble in the forties and early fifties meant being on the edge of both country life

and city conveniences. The town was small enough that, after World War II made automobile tires and gasoline difficult to obtain, our car went up on blocks and stayed there for years. We walked anywhere we needed to go. To get to the city—Houston—we could catch a bus or, occasionally, ride with a neighbor who invited my mother and me to go along on a shopping trip. I can remember, though, that before we started using legs instead of tires for transportation, Mother would drive with my brother and me to the parking lot at Weingarten's in the northern edge of Houston and we'd catch a city bus to the medical clinic or the dental school where she obtained affordable care for us. Or we'd go to the optical shop or shoe store where she did her careful, practical shopping. Then when we came back by city bus to our car, we'd do something wild. We'd buy fresh fish or bakery cinnamon rolls at Weingarten's. Then we'd climb in the car and head north on Highway 59 for home to get supper ready before Daddy got there.

More rare was an occasional schoolbus trip to Houston. I remember the first time I heard a live symphony—guess what, "Peter and the Wolf." Later, there was a memorable ballet performance of, I think, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, with Maria Tallchief. I still remember her unusual name, even if the name of the dance company may be incorrect. So, although I lived in a small town, constantly aware of my need to behave so as not to embarrass my family, I was aware that there was a greater world just an hour away down Highway 59, and that beyond that world there were others—the places from which ballets and symphonic music originated.

Humble itself was safe and cozy,

though. We were two blocks from Main Street and we had a garden and many animals my Dad wanted to care for—dogs and cats, of course, but also a cow and chickens, and more rarely, a goat. Once we raised a dogie calf. We called him Geronimo because he was a Red Angus, and treated him like a spoiled pet. Still, we understood that his purpose was to provide meat. My brother and I loved him and mourned his death, but we had been indoctrinated fully enough with country values to accept it as necessary. Love is good, sentimentality exists, but practicality rules. Daddy was our link with reality and Mother was our link with beauty—including poetry, books and music. Daddy cared for the animals, and Mother processed their products. She made butter and strained, bottled and sometimes sold the milk. She canned and preserved the fruits and vegetables, and she put up some of the beef from Geronimo in cans. I remember shucking corn for tamale wrappers and turning the crank on the can-sealing machine.

Our neighbor, Mr. Davant, published the weekly newspaper. Once he wrote a sensitive article about our Brahman cow (pronounced "bremmer" by most people I knew), which Daddy milked twice a day and staked out to graze every morning. It's true that she was more elegant looking than our usual Jerseys, with her slimmer, taller silhouette, long horns and smooth fawn-colored coat. And although her horns made her look fierce, she was a pussycat who loved to be petted. Reading Mr. Durant's article, I became aware that even simple, familiar things have layers of various shades and complexities. Certainly I had never thought of our cow as worthy of reverence, or

as having thoughts of far-off India while chewing her cud.

It was only much later that I realized that my life was like that, too. Simple on the surface, that is, but intertwined with layers of darker shading, complex textures and deeper meanings. The gentle, loving lessons in small-town ethics, in being properly kind, polite and moral, smoothed my life and my relationships with others. They made the good times better but, more important, kept my conscience clear and gave me the self-confidence and stability to survive when some hard blows came. I may have become something of an ostrich, ignoring some evils of the world, but I easily found something to smile or laugh at in most situations. We're all pretty funny, when you think of it.

It's a long distance, both in miles and years, from the days of a skinny-tired blue bike to those of a jet airplane. When I think now of what I'm still learning about myself and the world, I know exactly where I am! Halfway between naivete and knowledge, reaching for fuller understanding, neither at the beginning nor the end of my life's journey. I'm sure I'll reach the downside of the hill too soon to suit me, but with a difference so slight, who can tell? Someday, too, I'm sure to cross the River. But right now I'm still heading up, no matter how slightly.

I'm still climbing Moonshine Hill.

Passages

by Merrill O. Cantrell

Peering from the aeries of the tallest mountain peak
To the river of life, far, far below
Rising in clear mountain rills, flowing ever,
To the sea that swallows all life in its oneness.

Many boats, large and small, old and new,
Some with shiny white paint and polished brass,
And girls in shorts,
And men in three piece suits.

Others of all sizes and shapes and colors,
To the very old one with cracked paint
And leaking seams, a rusty coffee can
To bail out the water.

Many had no boat at all, just swimming,
Like the boats, some drifting with the current,
Others fighting their way upstream
With breaststroke, crawl or butterfly.

Why? To say I did it first,
To say I did it best,
Some just to say
I did it. Then,

A strange small group, standing erect,
Walking at the side of the river,
Ankle deep in water, letting the soft sandy mud
Squish, squish, squish between their toes.

Occasionally one would stop to open a lock,
Or sluice gate on a dam,
So others could pass on to their destiny,
Merging at last with the great sea.

I fell from my perch, grasped firmly
In the talons of a great eagle,
I was lowered safely to the water,
Then dropped into a swirling, churning eddy.

Whirling about, in body and mind,
I knew not whether I would swim or drift,
Or even stand naked in the shallow water,
Squishing mud between my toes.

Yet, whatever goal I set or attained,
The vision was burned into my being,
Once having seen that light,
Nothing would ever be the same.

Turn Back The Clock

by Catherine Starkey

Only yesteryear when we were young
and love still fresh and new,
My heart and time stood still
At the mere approach of you.

And only yesterday the starlight
Blessed our kiss,
While moonbeams cloaked our
tender love
And covered it with bliss.

Tonight you've gone away,
While here alone I pray.
I want tomorrow to be yesterday.



PASSAGES ON THE WHITE SAND by Lambros Douskos

Filled with Fields of You

by Emmitte Hall

Running through the rain
 You
Like a child, running through the meadow
 drenched in spring showers . . .
 Me
Following you through flowers
 red-yellow-orange and blue colors
 blurring in the chase . . .
 You
Reaching the hilltop
 lying beneath the branches of an oak
 waiting
with your head propped upon one arm
 raindrops dripping
 from your hair . . .
 your face . . . your lips . . .
 Me
Picking wet flowers from the earth
 a rainbow bouquet
 I bring to you
 on top of a hill,
 under a glorious sky.
 You
Rolling onto your back
 touching the flowers to your face
 taking in their fragrant colors
 Me
Falling down beside you
 breathless and alive
 loving spring showers,
 the fields filled with flowers
And every moment I spend with
 You.

Pages

by David Crawford

My life is an open manuscript
With the pages ripped out,
Pressed and dried between the folds
 of time,
Read by no one.

The Last Romance

by John Sanders

I danced with Romance
A long time ago
When I was still young.
I danced at every chance.

Now Romance and I
Pass only in dreams.
Sometimes our hands touch
And sometimes, I hear her sigh.

Passageways

by Emmitt Hall

We travelled different roads
Separate passages
that wound through
changing shades of darkness,
Before we burst into the open spaces of Then.

I fell into your dream-light,
followed you through deserted castle halls,
candle-lit passageways,
where our warm shadows danced.

Then we rode
into tangerine sunsets,
galloping on maiden's
misty unicorns of white.

Forever was my dream and held you tightly.

But hallways end,
and change direction,
then we find ourselves on different roads alone.

It's so easy to get lost in the passages.

We learn to survive,
We remember the old roads
the bad roads,
the ones that made us smile
and go on.

And we dream
because somewhere out there we know,
two silhouettes ride on forever,
sharing one passage to the sea.

The image makes us sad,
makes us remember,
for it was the passages that brought us together,
took us apart,
Brought us here and made us what we are today . . .
and we smile
then continue on our way.

Thoughts in the Park

by Merrill O. Cantrell

Ah the hardness of that bench was softened
And the coldness of the wind was warmed
By the sight of those young lovers
Kissing and laughing on that old stone bridge
A bridge so like the one where he held Sarah
Many years ago hugging kissing laughing
Where she called him beau
That was before he went away
Promising to come back another day
But never never did he see her again except
In his memory

And then Harriet came and stood
Side by side with him
Her dark blue eyes her long black hair
And the tiny bridge of freckles across her cheeks
That said I'm Irish love me
So he followed her as away she ran
To the top of a mountain and standing in the wind
Let her hair blow across her face and into his eyes
He thought there was no other in the whole world
That could hold him spellbound
Still he must love on and another took her
For his own a friend no less

He held a twinge of regret until
He met Gwenda short and sweet saucy and pert
Full of fire and flirt oh my yes
But he enjoyed every minute of it
A bright star into a sad life a spark of joy
No a flash of lightning
That shocked and brightened and renewed
With a zest for life unknown before or ever again
For he changed her as she changed him
They melded together
No longer two separate spirits one bright one sad
But one entity pouring forth more life
Into a world teeming with life already
But a world continually asking its young
To produce more

Now sitting alone on a park bench he wonders
Was it worth it . . . yeh ess . . . YES.

The Gate

by Angela Pyles

I stand before a gate to another dimension in time
mist on my face falling down from the night.
A shadow to my side moved and took form of death,
held out his bones, asked "have you come to find rest?"
Curiosity built and struck through my core,
I said "change me to you, I want life no more."
He took hold of my head between bones of his hands,
forced my gaze to his eyes as I stared in a trance.
Eyes of spectrums, rotation of color—
opened his throat, these words he did utter—
"Behind these gates time no longer exists—
land is not land, mist is not mist.
I can transport your soul from this land to beyond
but if only in death you feel you belong."
"Who are you?" I asked as I shook free my head.
"The gatekeeper to eternity, the land of the dead."
Then he turned back to reenter the shadows of time,
but warned—the gate to beyond was suicide.



DARKNESS TO LIGHT by Donald Hooks

Silence

by Jeremy Coe

Silence. I can't stand it any longer. That's all I heard at the hospital. It was the only sound at the funeral parlor. It's the only sound here, at the cemetery. Nothing.

Silence. The awful power of total quiet bores down on my soul, drilling at my conscience, screwing my mind. An alarming oblivion . . . a big, fat zero . . . no noise at all. I look at your grave.

Silence. Strange, this tranquility. The sun is pounding on my back with fists of intense heat, but I don't move. It's still, very still. I wish I could take off this black suit.

Why aren't the birds singing? Today is June the fourth. They should be chirping and flittering about or something, shouldn't they? The flowers are in bloom, especially the daisies and the bluebonnets on this verdant hilltop. Blue.

I can't hear the wind. Why is it so still? Where are the cars? They should be zooming down the highway, full of kids singing and laughing, headed for the lake. I don't hear a thing.

Everyone else is gone. They left hours ago. I'm the only one left. And you . . . you're still here. You and I. We were together in life, and now in death. For I am dead, too. Dead to the entire world, for now. Forever?

You're too young. Were. To die, I mean. You're 18. You had been walking across the stage only hours before. They called your name, and you walked over to get the diploma. Your tall figure strode quickly to the principal's waiting smile and shaking hand. You were relieved that you made it safely, because in eighth grade you tripped going up the stairs. Then you were a clumsy boy. Now, you are a man . . . were, that is.

But you're still my best friend. Brother, really. Twin brother, only much taller than I'll ever be. We were Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy, Mutt and Jeff. After the valedictorian's speech, the '91 seniors of the Winnsboro High School class of '91 circled up. You and I put our arms around each other . . . you on the right, me on the left . . . as we chanted our Senior cheer. We threw our caps up into the air. "Let's party!" you shouted.

Well, I guess we have finally escaped. Free! We had always been so worried about our freedom. Small town, small school, protective parents. Add the three of them together and it equals a little bit of rebellion. Just fighting for room to breathe. Breathing.

You first moved here in fourth grade. I didn't like you much, because you were popular with all the girls. But in fifth grade, we had class together, and we started talking. Your mom brought you over to my house one day, and while our mommies talked, we went and built a model of a World War II Nazi bomber. From then on we were inseparable. Even now.

In sixth grade, we relied on one another so much that you asked me what boys I wanted to come to your own party! We would take our toy guns into the bamboo grove behind your house and play guerilla warfare for hours. Just like your daddy did. Only he didn't play guns.

He was an artillery gunner in Vietnam. One time—only one, of all the times I went to your place to spend the night—you showed me his photo scrapbook, his bullets, his uniform. You said once, rather matter-of-factly, that he had been exposed to Agent Orange. He came home to your mother, married and then you came along. Your dad was a Houston police officer, the best of the best, a boy in blue. You always did like cop movies, come to think of it. The only reminders of him you had out were his shiny silver badges in their oak frame and the

picture of a small, sandy-headed boy in a baseball uniform and a cherubic smile squatting by a large man with sideburns and a mustache. He died when you were five. You never talk about it much . . . I mean, talked about it much.

I remember a story you told me once. Your daddy was sick and staying in the hospital, but you had a tee-ball game. Your team was behind the entire game, but you rallied in the last inning and your team won. What? Was it 11 to 9? Anyway, you went home and your grandfather told you what had happened. You would never see your daddy again. Not alive.

I always had it so much easier than you. I lived the life of Beaver Cleaver; I had two brothers, a father with a good job at middle-class salary, a mother that liked to bake cookies and bread. I envied you often, though . . . you were so worldly-wise, and I was so innocent. I heard about the birds and the bees from you, because you knew long before I did. Your mommy let you watch good movies on TV, but I couldn't watch a show unless it was in black-and-white.

You were tall and handsome. I was short and had thick glasses. You played football and basketball. I was a nerd and made good grades. Still, only now do I realize that there was one thing I had that you really wanted. A dad. I'm so sorry!

We're free. Sort of. I'll leave home and go to college. I'll be leaving my younger brother, my mother and my father . . . by choice. You didn't have a choice. It wasn't your decision for him to die. And I didn't want you to die either.

Damn him! Damn that drunk kid! Why did you get in a car with someone that was stoned, anyway, huh? Why??! You know better than that! You knew better than that.

We had girl problems. You always had a girlfriend, but they were rarer in my case. Remember how we always got dumped on? Seems like every time, something would go wrong and we would come griping

to each other. And I could always read you like a book . . . whenever you really liked somebody, you'd say "Really. It's no big deal. I mean, we're just friends!" I wanted you to be the best man at my wedding. Would you have?

Silence. If only you could answer my questions.

We were actors, you and I. Born for the stage. As freshmen, we discovered theater. The drama program at our school was awful, but we loved it anyway. We probably spent hours each week onstage. Perhaps because we could create our own reality, or to forget about our own . . . more than likely, though, because we sometimes did not like who we were.

But I am practical. The eternal pragmatist, I couldn't go into acting for a living. Not enough money. No job security. I'll go into journalism. But you, you're a free spirit. You would go through long hours of practice, working night jobs, playing small parts, for your art. You could've been on Broadway some day. Could have.

The last play we ever did was "The Outsiders" by S.E. Hinton. I played Johnny, and you were Dallas. Johnny died. But before he did, he learned a poem by Robert Frost. It goes like this:

Nature's first green is gold
Her hardest hue to hold
Her early leaf's a flower
But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf
So Eden sank to grief
So dawn goes down today
Nothing gold can stay.

It is almost night now, but still silent . . . silently still. For a summer night, it is remarkably chilly. The sun has gone down; all but a touch of yellow, tinting the western sky, has disappeared. Maybe it will stay a little longer, in remembrance of you. But nothing gold can stay forever.

I recall the graduation party. You had a few beers, but you had drunk before. No big deal. The first time you had ever guzzled one of them down, out in some hick's pasture, all the jocks patted you on the back. "That's a step in the right direction!" they said. You were suddenly cool. I had stood by quietly, angry that you compromised your principles. Just to be cool. Beer doesn't even taste good.

On graduation night, I was feeling good. Freedom! And then I compromised my principles. I promised myself, "Just this once!" I used every justification in the book. The jocks cheered me on as the head cheerleader handed me one. I managed to get the awful thing to its destination, after considerable sputtering and choking. My back was patted condescendingly by the most popular people in the school. I was cool, too.

Don't ask me why we had to take a drink. If there was one thing we knew for sure, it is that you don't have to get wasted to have fun. We'd done it for 8 years, together! But we were free, we were cool, we lost our mind . . . then you lost your life.

You had never talked about your dad much. But in the last few months, your feelings, suppressed for so long, surfaced. A bitter remark, a wistful comment . . . I knew it was all coming back to you. You had no father to part with. No one to send you off to a new world. No one.

You were going through "father-withdrawal." I knew it was coming, but I couldn't help you. I had never experienced a loss like yours. Never seen Death. I was removed from reality. Right here, right now, though, I know . . .

Silence.

It is dark. I must leave soon. There are so many unanswered questions, yet, that my thoughts will gnaw away at my brain until

nothing is left. Pain. Did you know, all the manly stuff aside, that I loved you? Was I the friend and example that I wanted to be? Worst of all . . . did I ever tell you about Jesus? Did you die not knowing? God, help me if I never helped you.

Still silence.

I knew we would part someday, but not this way. Damn that cold-blooded killer!! I hope he never sleeps peacefully! I hope his mind is never still. I hope he gets no mercy.

Silence. An unearthly quiet, all but the pounding of the veins at my temples. A steady pulsation, echoing mechanically, breaks the stillness with its cacophony. Driving me mad. I can't stand it anymore. I turn from your grave, feeling forces pulling me back towards you, then away.

The air is full of tiny wishes, unfulfilled, buzzing around my head. Louder, louder, louder!! I cry in pain as they all sting my face. I put my hands up to ward off the pests, but the droning continues incessantly. One by one, they line up and fly through my ears. Deafening.

I wish that you had made it to Broadway. I wish you could have been my best man. I wish that we had never started drinking at that party. I really wish that you had never got in the car with a drunk driver. And I wish . . . oh, God, I wish . . . that my dad had never given me the keys to the car that night. John, please forgive me!! God, have mercy on me.

The forces cease pulling me apart, and I fall helplessly. As the grass below me speeds upwards, my eyes blur until there is nothing visible. My brain, hurting after what seems years of toil and grinding wheels, skids to a halt. The night closes in around me, wrapping me in long, dark arms, consoling me, cooing a quiet melody . . . singing me to sleep with the sounds of silence.

The Beast of Human Pride

by Teresa Barecky

As I travel through this maze,
this labyrinth called life.
What passage lies before me,
be it happiness or strife.
The Minotaur of fate,
it stalks me day to day.
How will I find the courage,
the thread that marks my way.
The paths of all my yesterdays
have led to my tomorrows.. .
This is the map of who I am;
my truths, my hopes, my sorrows.
The Minotaur that stalked me,
made me strong along the way.
So I wake each dawn with courage,
to face the coming day.
The beast it has not beaten me,
you see I've learned its name.
And since I've learned to face it,
I can play its little game.
As days turned into weeks
and weeks turned into years,
my dreams turned into courage,
dispelling all my fears.
Instead of looking outward,
I've learned to look inside.
The beast that's locked within me,
is nothing more than pride.



SHADOWS by Emmitt Hall

I'd seen him cry
and I'd seen his hands ashaking
I'd seen him laugh
when I knew his heart was breaking

by Keith Mathis

Passage of Life

by Patricia Bickley

Life is a passage one must take,
Living each day with the possibility
of a mistake.
Mistakes are something we all
must make,
In this passage of life we learn
to give and take.

The Warrior

by Jeremy Coe

I watched the mighty warrior,
As he strode forward, ever forward,
Ever, always pressing onward
To the brightness of his glory.

He strode, never shirking,
Always reaching, always working,
His ambition, all-consuming,
Fed a brain that starved for glory.

He set his jaw, pulled down his visor,
Climbing higher, ever higher,
And deep inside, there burned a fire
Burning him with dreams of glory.

He fought, but kept to smiling,
All the while, all things reviling,
And never, never tiring
As he fought his way to glory.

He passed things of great beauty,
Caring not for worldly booty,
And he felt a solemn duty
To be crowned with wreaths of glory.

As I watched the mighty warrior,
marching forward, ever forward,
Ever pressing onward (to the glory, glory, glory)
A pebble threw him backward,
And he fell steps away from glory.



AND TIME GOES ON by Lisa Camp

Passage By Pen

by Merrill O. Cantrell

The steaming rain forest added new dimensions to discomfort. In addition to the sultry 110 degree heat, there came flocks of flies, gnats and mosquitos, each determined to supply its share of aggravation. I reached into my pack for a can of Raid and drove them back into the jungle.

This small success caused me to whistle a tune as I walked on through the perpetual twilight. Two hundred feet above me a tropical midday summer sun beat upon the tops of the trees. Little light came through the dense foliage, but the broad green leaves absorbed the burning heat and lowered it in thick folds like a blanket to cover the forest floor.

In the narrow trail a giant king cobra uncoiled half his length and swayed hypnotically in front of me spreading the massive hood behind his head. He hissed to make certain of my attention, then sibilantly

said, "I am King and this is my trail. If you would use it, you must pay a tribute. A dozen eggs, a coney or a small panda would do nicely."

I looked as straight as I could into his swaying eyes and answered, "Apparently, your majesty, you do not realize to whom you speak. I am a creative writer!"

"Surely you are not going to give me that old saw about the pen being mightier than the sword, or fang in this case?"

"Certainly not, let me demonstrate." I pulled out my notebook and pen before he could object. He sidled around by my side and looked over my shoulder, his beady little eyes staring at my notebook.

I wrote, "The huge king cobra demanded a tribute to walk his trail," then with a bold stroke I drew a line through the passage. I felt his head rest on my shoulder, but I could not know of the sharp pain that went through his body or

the weakness he felt, could I?

I wrote a second line, "The sneaky black egg-sucking chicken snake blocked the path and demanded a tribute." Then, darker than before, I lined through that statement. I felt the head slide off my shoulder and a body fall in a coil at my feet.

I wrote one last time. This time the snake at my feet could not see what I wrote, but it made little difference. I looked down and with the toe of my shoe tossed the tiny green garter snake aside into the grass.

Replacing my notebook and pen, I continued on my way. A pale electric blue aura drifted away from my head and shoulders; then it dissipated quickly in the super-heated air. My step was springier and I whistled another little tune. It always made me happy when I could write in the first person, omniscient mood.

Travelling Together: Worlds Overhead

by G. Paul Ray

Across a darkened Texas panhandle
On a moonless October night
no cars or lights
in sight
Save only the dim twinkle of
Distant worlds overhead.

The land around us lay silent:
An outstretched slumbering giant.
We talk of life, love, and past events.
Discussion of God,

no cause of pretense.
We share our naked emotion
on promises of devotion,
But neither of us really knows
If times will be as good as those
Travelling together,
no one in sight,
Across a darkened Texas panhandle
On a moonless October night.

I Am Going To Die . . .

by Jeremy Coe

"I am going to die."

"That's not an especially shrewd observation," I say to myself. "At your age, I would hope you know your mortal limitations." All my life, I have flirted with danger and death of various sorts. I have mockingly stuck my nose out farther and up higher than many men dared. And I have always come through it unscathed. It has long been the story that I, a Coe, have had all the luck while my peers and friends were crushed when taking only slight risks. But they are all fools. None of them know how to play the game, as I do. Yet, by not playing, they stay out of danger, whereas I . . . I am called for cheating. I learned quickly when to recognize the correct time to lie, and when to expound the truth; how to perceive a chance out of impossibilities; why some people are to be useful and others are not worth the effort.

Irony has a bitter flavor. My life has been a continual success, and even my enemies respect my feats for they are numerous. Yet now, after years spent without care, with few disappointments and no regrets, my life will soon be over. How strangely fitting that the lead horse after two laps should die in the home stretch! And I wonder if anything I've ever done has made me truly happy. Did I do anything famous or infamous enough to be remembered?

What does "important" mean? I've never figured it out, myself. I've never figured out whether or not I care. I'm not quite sure I want to . . . I've just gone through my days as an existence: from one meal to another, in between bedtimes, a high to a low, in between daydreams.

I'm going to die.

Far before I had expected. It is a

cool, beautiful day in April, and this beautiful April afternoon has been spent (so far) in a cabin in Pueblo, Colorado. I'm lying on my back, atop a dusty cot, inside of a dark, damp cabin while the sun is gently smiling outdoors and the wind is winding its winsome way through the weeds. And I'm in here, even with all that out-of-doors, because I'm going to die. Soon. And I'll never be able to look at those fields the same way again.

You see, I am in a prison, and the only way out of it is to break the manacles of life binding me. Yet I will bear this burden gladly until others unchain me. They will be happy to do it for me. I'm locked up, with no more chances to do the important things I have been musing over. And I will continue to lie here until they come to take me away.

So I lie on my back, on this wretched cot, thinking dark thoughts in the dark room. A bug has landed on my nose, and the disgusting creature feels as if it weighs one hundred pounds as it walks with measured tread the path up my head. It has been so long since I stirred that my arm cannot quickly decipher the message its master sends it, and the limb moves ever so slowly to flick the alien away. My fingers are now scratching my chin, and my whiskers, untamed after six days of confinement, stiffly fight back.

The days are blurring together now, and I have only occasionally stirred to eat the scraps they give me. Most of the time I lie on my back, spread out on the musty berth, scratching my chin and staring up at the low ceiling, pondering weighty matters that I know really don't matter. My heart is pumping now, and my breath labors. I lie here, staring upwards into nothingness, swishing the large

piece of irony around in my mouth; savoring it, like a disgusting food that you want to spit out but find that you can't. No man should have to make his peace alone! Does my imagination play vicious tricks on me, or is that the sound of hoof-beats approaching? My courage, have you failed me now? Intelligence, longtime ally, have you failed me, also? What can save me?

I am "Captain" William Coe, formerly Cyrenus J. Coe, and I am going to die. It is April 10, 1868, and soon I will gasp my last. Without hope. Without happiness. Without knowing that which I wanted knowledge of. And the horses have stopped. There is a man coming toward the bolted door of this forsaken, damp cabin in Pueblo, Colorado, on this beautiful day. He is Sheriff H. R. Price, coming to take me to eternal damnation.

A flash of light temporarily blinds me, and I remember my father, a reverend. I recall the doctrine he had preached, the same one that I had scoffed at so many years ago. And I laugh defiantly. Not at my childhood God, but at Sheriff H. R. Price, coming to take me to the eternal damnation I had strived so hard all my days to obtain. I had done a good job of it. I recollect how that loving, kind man that used to bounce me on his knee had once said.

"The most abominable sinner in the world may, on his deathbed, cry out to the Lord in mercy and he will receive it. For the Saviour forgave his persecutors even as they crucified him."

I am that persecutor. I fall down to the floor and cry out, "Lord, save me!" And he has.

I slowly walk out to the waiting wagon and climb in. Fifty vigilantes surround me, and one cries,

"Better take your blanket!" I calmly reply, "No, I won't need it." Another says, much to his friends amusement, "No, I reckon it will be plenty hot where he's going!" On the ride to the hanging tree, I quickly recall my life.

I had been a First Lieutenant in the Union Army. However, an opportunity to steal the government's mules became too much temptation to resist. Soon a band of rustlers, known as the "Cherry Valley Thieves," formed around me. I carried a .44 Colt percussion pistol and a Henry repeating rifle, and with these two persuasive comrades many a wagon train was deprived of its valuable goods. This unruly mob became the Coe Gang after a year, and the likes of Henry Clay, William Henry Harrison, Ira Schofield and 150 others followed me on raids on Forts Union, Lyon, Bascom and Barclay. We were even so bold as to rob an army paymaster and then throw gold coins to the troops as we rode out of town.

From all this, the spring of 1868, I have been on the run. Captured

several times, we always managed to escape. On April 6, I arrived at the home of a lifetime friend. After eating, I decided to take a nap in the bunkhouse. Mrs. Emory, having long since tired of our relationship, had her son ride after a nearby cavalry unit. When I awoke, the shed was surrounded and fighting was not worth the effort. Still half asleep, they dragged me out and took me to a military court in Pueblo where I was convicted. And now I am being jostled about in the wagon. The sun has now gone down and night has fallen, but the full moon's reflection off the dew on the grass, which was once beautiful to me, seems different because I am about to die. But I am happy.

We have stopped, and I am now standing up in the wagon. My new designer tie fits snugly around my neck. My mouth, tensing with each moment, fills with saliva, and I have trouble swallowing. As I gulp it down, the rope draws so tight that it burns my throat. Some brave soul shouts,

"Coe, you are now about to meet

your Maker. Have you anything to say or last messages to give?" I do not reply.

I have seen men hang before, and I think satirically to myself that I do not relish the fate myself. But death, no matter the form or fashion, is death. A shrill voice echoes, and the horses run hell-for-leather out from under me. After a sickeningly long half second drop, my body jerks upward as my momentum is checked by the noose. My neck is not broken; "What a shame," I think to myself. I was rather hoping it would mercifully snap and get it over with. Now my head will explode as the pressure of the blood builds. I am writhing in physical agony, yet my soul already feels as if it were drifting away from the sordid scene. A light off in the distance grows brighter, and I am warm, comfortable and suddenly indescribably happy. Immediately around me, it grows pitch black, and it is like water or tar was swirling in around me. Very soon I will be . . .

Macchu Picchu

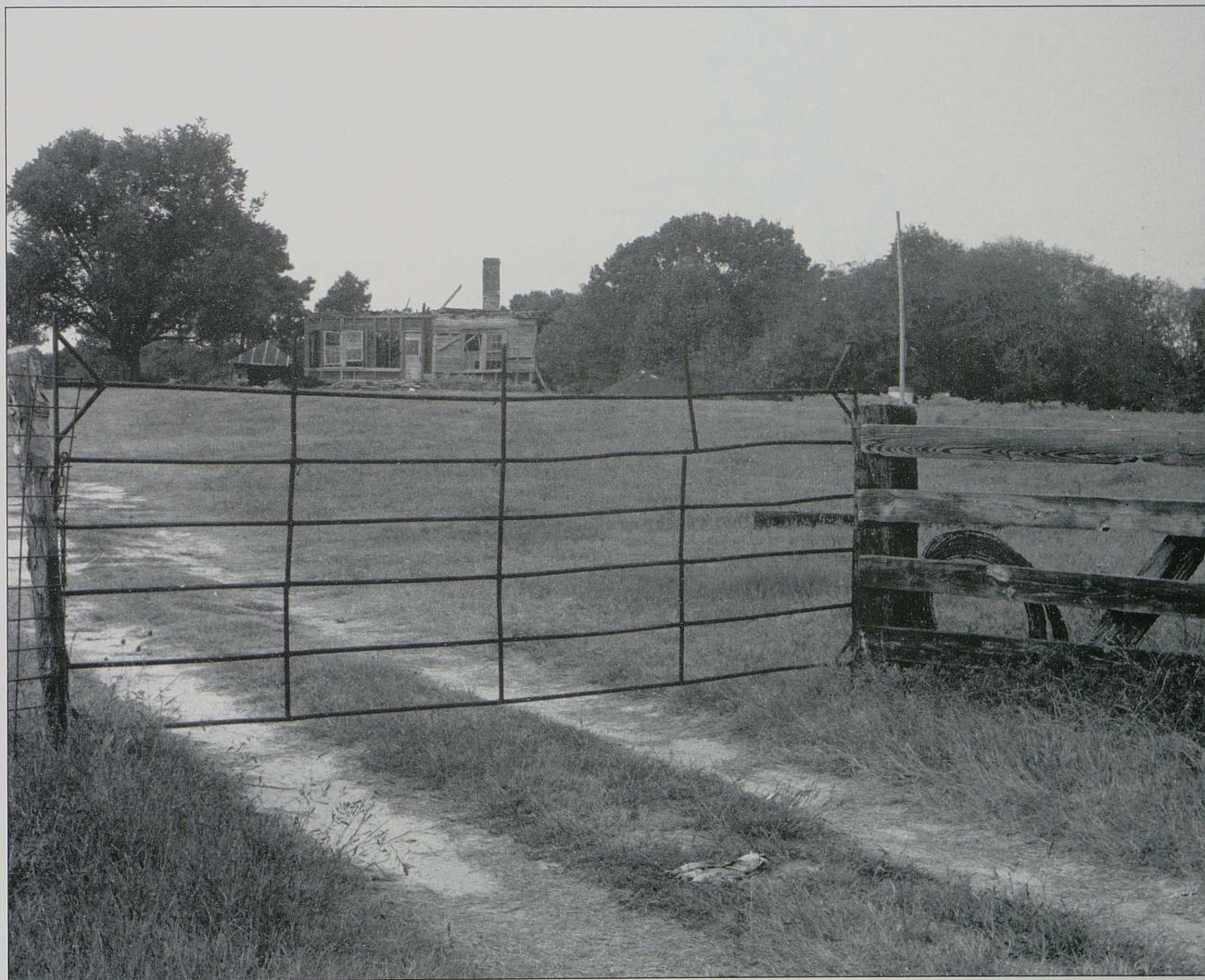
by Elaine Graybill

Vertical labyrinth of stone,
you rise in the Peruvian Andes,
a silent witness to the passage of time.
I am humbled by your majesty,
and recall your days of glory.
Yet, looking at you now,
I have to wonder how many laborers,
how many beasts of burden,
died to build this city for Inca nobles?
How much sacrifice in the name
of civilization?
Only the condor knows.

Troubled Waters

by Julie Clayton

Waves thrashing, crashing,
Tossing a troubled ship,
Disturbing the serene surroundings,
Endangering its calm existence,
Until a familiar hand
Touches the ship,
One that knows its every need,
And once again returns the ship
To a calm harbor.



THROUGH THE AGES by Lisa Camp
25

A Passing Adventure

by Doris McBrien

The last September before I started college in the spring of '90, I persuaded a friend to go to Grand Canyon with me. I had regaled her for several years with tales of the adventure of hiking in the world's greatest canyon. Swamping her with photos of hikers crouched in the shade of rocks or leaning against scraggly cedars, I sang the praises of the trail. I could not imagine that she could resist the call of the trail forever. She couldn't. My dog Boogie didn't require any persuasion to go with us.

We thought we should go while we are still young. We planned to hike down the Kaibab Trail to Cedar Ridge. Only a mile and a half, it is the hardest of the short hikes open to the public. Yet, we secretly hoped that we would be tempted beyond our power to resist to go on to the river, eight miles down the trail.

We hit our first snag before we got to my sister Justine's house in Roswell, New Mexico. Lee's van quit running as we were slowly driving through a road construction zone, 50 miles east of Roswell. The workers helped us call a wrecker, and on the way, in the driver radioed to have Justine meet us at the garage. We loaded ourselves and our gear into her little car. It was a Saturday afternoon; the mechanics wouldn't look at Lee's van until Monday morning. That gave us an unexpected couple of days to visit with my sisters and brothers who live in Roswell.

We got the car at 10 o'clock Monday morning and continued over the mountains. We spent the night in Socorro, a special kind of town found along the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. Such towns have existed since the colonization of the area by Spain 400 years ago and have never completely lost

their colonial flavor.

The next day, at Quemado, in western New Mexico, a town of not more than a few hundred people, we had a picnic lunch in a little park. By contrast with what happened immediately afterward that picnic seemed unusually pleasant. As we were getting back into the van, Lee tripped and fell from it, shattering her kneecap. The whole population of Quemado gathered around and two or three men lifted Lee into the van.

The nearest hospital was in Springerville, Arizona, 55 miles west. I drove there without noticing much of anything along the way. When Lee had been examined and put in a splint, we decided that, having come so far, we would try to enjoy as much of Arizona as she could stand.

We continued west along the Mogollon Rim, the "Tonto Rim" of Zane Grey fame. It is the southern edge of the Coconino Plateau, rugged and beautiful. I'm afraid that I was reluctant to give up and wanted very much for her to see Oak Creek Canyon, and Grand Canyon from the South Rim.

We were at a disadvantage because of Lee's disability and pain and were limited to what we could do from the car. Consequently, I hurried past much of the scenic beauty. We missed most of the fabulous "rim views," but we did see one when we came to what I thought was a broad, deep valley. We went down and across to enter Oak Creek Canyon, which cuts into the southern edge of the Coconino Plateau. The massive red buttes that become visible from the north only after driving 10 miles along the bottom of the canyon, were visible for miles as we approached from the south. Soon they surrounded us.

Driving through Sedona, we made sure we had enough gasoline to make it up the canyon and to Flagstaff, 28 miles away. Then, leisurely, we saw as much of the area's extraordinary beauty as we could see from the van. While leaving the canyon at the north end, about halfway up a spectacular set of switchbacks,—inexplicably—we ran out of gas. I got out of the van to warn the traffic coming around the curve below us and those coming around the curve above us on the other side of the narrow road. I asked each if he had any gasoline. After a few minutes, a man in a pickup truck, five cars down, waved his hand and slowly nodded his head. I let everyone else get out of the way any way they could. He gave us two gallons of gasoline and I drove gingerly into Flagstaff.

We found out in Flagstaff that the fuel pump had gone out and we had been losing gasoline along the road. We were warned not to drive with gasoline running over the motor, so we had to be towed once more. By this time Boogie had seen quite enough of riding in a car that was being towed. The suitcases, icebox and cameras slid around in the motion and we found Boogie rolled up in ball under the dashboard. The wrecker drivers would not let him ride in the cabs—for some strange reason.

After spending the night in a Sears parking lot in order to be first served the next morning, we were told that they didn't replace fuel pumps. We had to be towed for the third time. When we finally got the van fixed about three o'clock in the afternoon, Lee suggested, and I agreed, that we should go home. I drove to a restaurant on the highway, drank four cups of coffee, took two for the road and headed for Interstate 40.

At about one o'clock in the morning I woke Lee to see the lights of Albuquerque. Coming from the west at night the light shows in the sky from a long

distance. One never knows from the top of which of a series of hills the view of Albuquerque will appear. Suddenly, as we crest a hill, the lights spill out along the Rio Grande Valley until they fade in the distance to the north and south, an unforgettable sight, a valley of diamonds.

We made it home about 5:30 Saturday afternoon. Lee had an appointment Monday to prepare for surgery on her knee. I stopped at my house to let Boogie out, thinking he would be glad to get home. Then I drove a half-mile to Lee's house. After I had helped her

into the house and greeted her husband and family, I went out to drive home to unload my things. There sat Boogie in the driver seat with his paws on the wheel, as if to say, "I'll help with the driving if I have to, but you're not going to get away without me!"

While Lee is getting back to normal, I am going to school. When I get my degree and she is in good shape again we will go back to Grand Canyon. I had my 65th birthday a few weeks ago and I sometimes feel that we're not going to be young forever . . .



BACK TO SCHOOL by Charline Wallis



AMERICAN POLITICS by Charles R. Williams

Are Traditions Passed Down or Up?

by Emogene King

We took an important side-trip the other day—my son and I. We went to his son's "secret place." How did I know it was important for him to show it to me? Why did I understand the ritual that had taken place a few days earlier when my grandson had revealed the "secret" to his daddy? Because, I am part of the chain through which traditions are passed up.

There were several "secret places" in my childhood. I can no longer remember their exact location nor why they were special. However, the trip to show them to my parents (after some coercion) stands out very vividly in my

memory. I usually took them separately, this made the adventure last twice as long. With a flair for the dramatic, I sometimes added such tidbits as, "I think I was the first white man to come here." My generation knew little about technology, but a lot about "Cowboys and Indians." Since I cannot remember any comment either parent made about one of these places, their opinion of my "find" was not necessarily important to me. It was the trip, the ritual, of my showing the past generation a discovery I had made. It was my way of saying, "You brought me into this world, but I

am finding my own way through it."

As I climbed up the red clay river bank that day, I knew I must keep going even though my middle-aged muscles were straining. Nor was I disappointed when the "secret place" turned out to be a very mundane flat area at the top of a steep, muddy bank. "Secret places" are not notorious for their geographic attributes, but because an emerging individual, a child, picked them to be special.

As I thought about this incident later, I realized an important "Rite of Passage" had occurred. My son, who had shared his childhood with me, was showing me his role in life

has expanded. He is now part of the generation who gets taken on important trips to "secret places." But, he will pass the experience "up" to me as it must have been done through the generations before us.

Now I feel the cold draft of reality come over me as I realize I am the "dead-end" generation of my line. There is no one for me to pass "up" to. How did this happen, I cannot be the "older" generation when I feel like a scared child so much of the time. Every morning I wonder who the "mature" woman in the mirror is. It cannot be me, I am still a girl trying to find my way.

Did my mother, who died recently at 88, still feel that way?

I see my older grandson and wonder if I will ever see his son. Will they understand the passing on of traditions? Could either of them envision me as young? I imagine my grandmother looking down the line and marvelling at the fact that I am a grandmother. I know I am a conduit through which traditions have passed both ways, and it gives me a warm, connected feeling. I look at the clear, probing eyes of my baby grandson and for a second I think I catch a reflection of his father, or is it my father, or is it . . .

Self-Tailored

by Julie Clayton

It is my dress,
I wear it.
If it does not fit,
I can recognize that.
If it is a little large,
I can take it up.
If it is a little small,
I can let it out.
If it is the wrong color,
I can exchange it.
Although many times
I fall in love with the dress
And feel I must have it,
If it is unbecoming on me
And changes my image too much,
I am capable of realizing it,
Putting it back on the rack,
And walking away
To continue my search
For the perfect dress.

Convenient Donor

by G. Paul Ray

I could not make it through Christmas
with you in a hospital room,
breathing hospital air,
eating hospital food.
I could not go home at night
or enjoy the music I'd hear.
I could not buy any presents
or spread the holiday cheer.
I could not leave your side.
I'd have to stare
at your face.
I'd look beyond your eyes
and find you there
someplace.
If your heart were
no longer working, and
a machine were in its stead,
needing a convenient donor,
to give life though they were dead,
I'd give you the perfect gift that year:
we'd never be apart.
'Cause on that Christmas Day, my friend,
I'd give you my heart.

The Pale Horse

by Merrill O. Cantrell

The grey horse topped the mountain pass and plodded slowly, with stumbling steps down the narrow trail into the valley of Ben Hinnom, once known to the Jews as the Valley of Slaughter. His rider sprawled over the pommel of the saddle and clutched the horse's mane. Exhaustion fought for their lives, but an unconquerable spirit kept them moving toward a tiny light in the distance, a campfire, a meeting place, their destination.

About the campfire sat three men quietly eating recently roasted deer. This place, Tophet, once saw great sacrificial fires burning babies to the detestable pagan god Baal. Their fire burned brightly over the ashes of thousands of previous fires.

Three magnificent horses pranced at the end of their tethers, one white, one red, one black. Well-fed, watered, rubbed down and curried, they raised proud heads and neighed at each other. They earned their good treatment for they served their masters well.

Having finished their meal, the three men reclined on silken sheets propped up on one elbow by several down-filled pillows, sipping Turkish coffee. The one who rode the white horse wore a golden crown set with many expensive jewels, diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires. He spoke.

"Simon, Levi, I noticed your horses are in excellent condition, hardly used at all."

Levi, the rider of the black replied, "You can see by my attire and the balances I carry that I am a businessman. My master sent me out months ago to create chaos in the marketplace. I traveled leisurely around the world doing just that.

"Wheat that sold last year for \$3.58 a bushel now quotes at a penny, barley went from \$1.25 to

three bushels for a penny. Of course, no one is actually selling. They have stockpiled it, in warehouses, elevators and laid in the fields for the rats until the price should go up again.

"Meanwhile, the hungry people are rioting, burning the fields, the elevators and the homes of the men who own them. I did my job. I created a depression like the world has never seen before, and this crooked little balance did most of the work."

He lifted the balance and shook the kinks out of the chains. It tilted to one side. Levi grinned a crooked grin and sipped his Turkish coffee. The crowned one asked the one who rode the red horse.

"And how did you do, Simon?"
"As simple as my name, O king. I followed a few weeks after Levi. Every place he left in economic chaos. It was a simple matter for me to step in with a few trained soldiers and teach the farmers to use the sword and spear instead of scythe and pitchfork.

"A little basic military training in weapons, tactics and engineering, such as building siege ramps; and the economic chaos became political chaos. I taught the hungry people to blame the government for the problems caused by the greedy businessmen. From that followed full-scale revolution.

"Blood ran in streets ankle-deep, to the fetlocks of the horses. Once they got a taste for killing, nothing could stop them. Everyone and everything that represented the establishment had to go.

"Levi's work made my job easier, but I alone took away the peace and taught them to kill one another. I will not back up to the Master to receive my reward!"

Simon refilled his cup and took a long sip of the steaming hot brew. He withdrew his sword by the jeweled hilt and wiped the blade lovingly with an oiled silk cloth

until it flashed all the colors of the rainbow where the firelight struck it.

"My friends, the work you did speaks for itself, and I will add my praises when the Master comes. Your work facilitated things for me. The Master sent me to conquer and subdue all the kingdoms of the earth and I have done that. I speak and my word goes to the ends of the earth."

The grey horse slipped to his knees as he approached the camp. One man shouted, "It's him!" Another grabbed some sheets and pillows and made him a bed by the fire. The rider's servant jumped from his mule and ran forward, then gently lifted his master and carried him toward the camp. He laid him on the bed.

The grey horse recovered quickly with good food, water and care from the servant. His master, even after a night's rest and the finest breakfast possible, still lay flat on his back, weak and still. The king questioned him about his mission.

"Ah, yes, my mission. To destroy one-fourth of the earth's population. It seemed easy enough, once I killed all but eight of them, but I wasn't allowed to use that method again. I started in the greatest city on earth. It seemed so easy at first, I sliced off any head that came in range of my sword; the score ran up quickly.

"Then, as my sword came down on a little old lady in worn-out clothes, an angel appeared behind her and said to me only, 'She's a Christian, you can't have her.' He touched my sword with his. An electric shock knocked the sword from my hand and me from the saddle. Even my great horse fell to his knees.

"I retrieved my sword and mounted. She walked away into the crowd. I continued slower, more deliberate, often I could stop my swing just as I saw the angel flash

in my vision, but not always. My strength fails me because of the pounding I have taken the past few weeks, but I finished my job, over one billion souls to my credit."

The king asked, "If you knew what would happen, why didn't you just avoid these Christians?"

"That's the strange part. They look just like anyone else. It's something inside that makes them different!"

"Well, you relax now, the Master can restore you when he comes, then we'll celebrate the victory!"

"No, the prophet has spoken. My servant and I wait for the pit burning with fire and brimstone."

"But surely the Master . . ."

The king was unable to finish his sentence. The sky lit from one end to the other with a brightness like

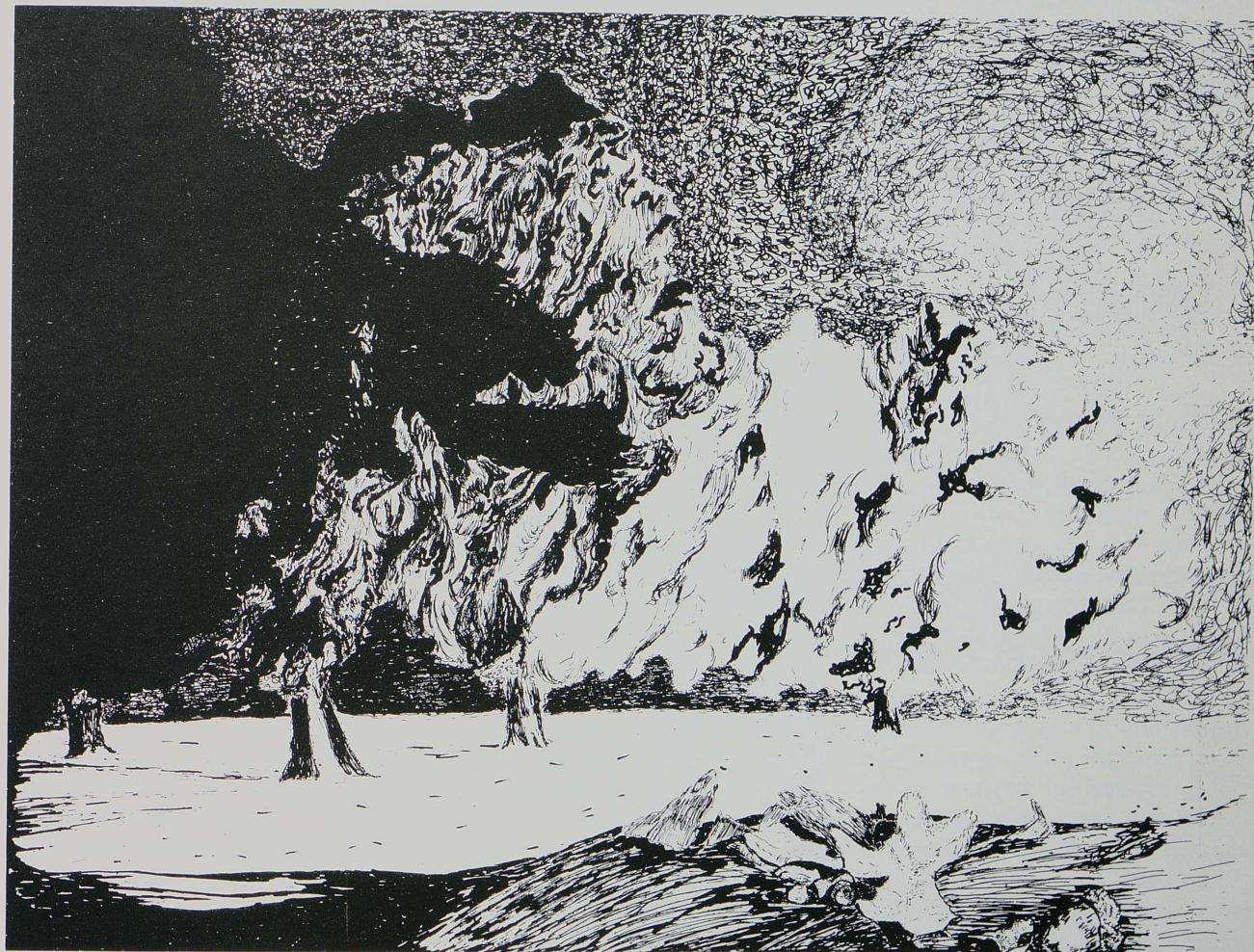
sheet lightning that did not flicker. The clear clarion call of a trumpet sounded across the sky and echoed between the peaks of the mountains.

A great rumble sounded as rocks rolled away from the openings of tombs dug into the sides of the mountains centuries ago. Bodies still in shrouds floated upward. The shrouds and swaddling clothes fell away leaving them dressed in pure white robes. The voice of a great multitude sounded from the heavens singing a new song.

The three men shuddered with fear. The recent arrival and his servant were gone. They waited for their Master. He never arrived. A faint smell of sulphur drifted in on the quiet desert breeze.

Birth, Life, Death, the rest:
Like tides stages flow and ebb
With no chance to drink.

by Jeremy Coe



SEEDS by Charles R. Williams

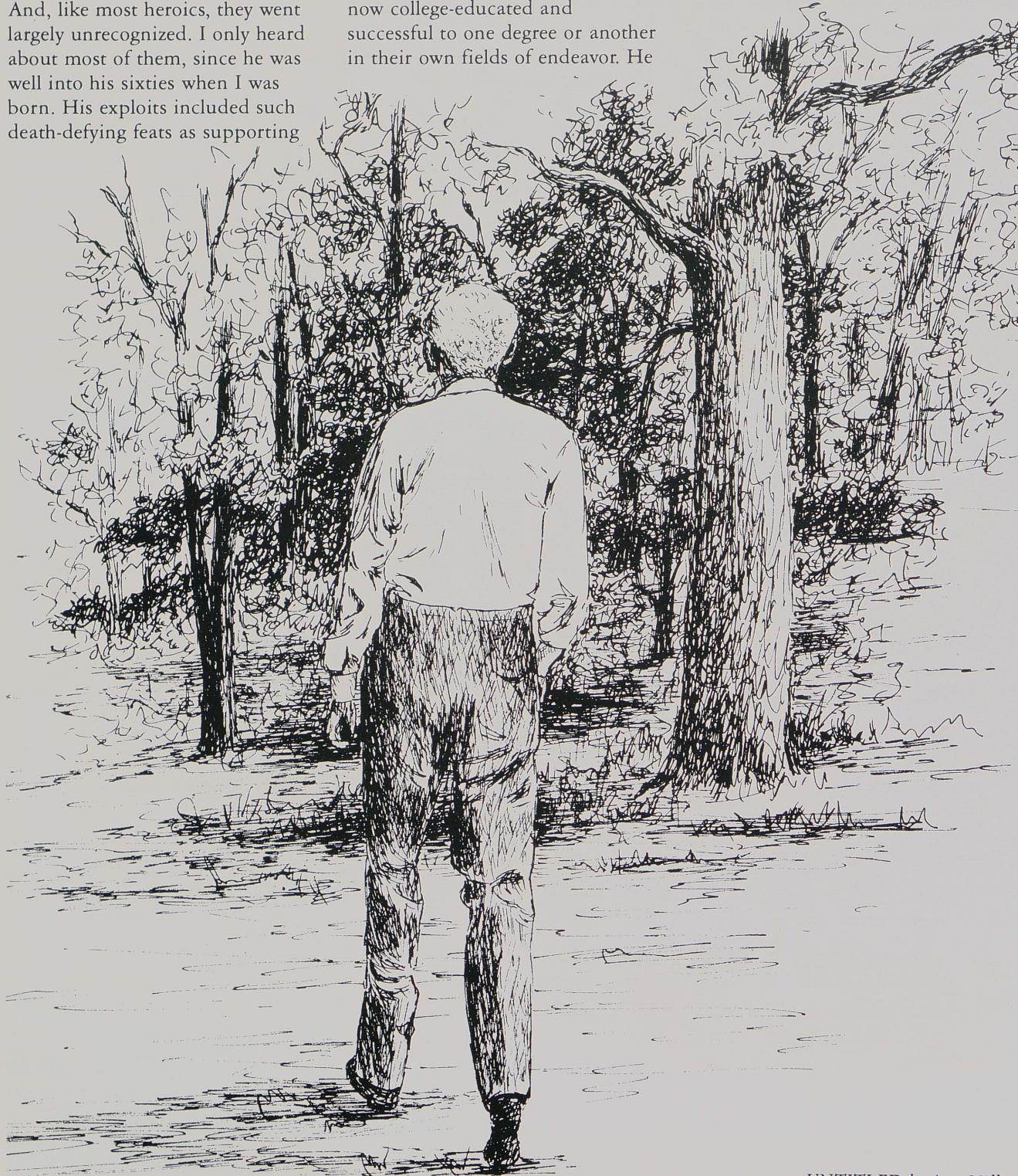
I'm Watchin' Him. Yonder He Goes.

by Keith Mathis

The heroic deeds my grandfather performed were of the every-day, ordinary type, like most heroics are. And, like most heroics, they went largely unrecognized. I only heard about most of them, since he was well into his sixties when I was born. His exploits included such death-defying feats as supporting

his family through the Great Depression, and helping to raise his three children, all of whom are now college-educated and successful to one degree or another in their own fields of endeavor. He

didn't fight in any wars or rescue any babies from burning buildings. He was simply a good-hearted,



UNTITLED by Ann Miller

honest, hard working, down-to-earth man. I could have learned a lot more from him than I did, if I had only had the chance.

I was only able to visit him 10 or 12 times in my whole life. I was an Air Force brat, so my family moved a lot. It seems that for most of my childhood my family was in a transitional mode. We usually visited my grandparents while en route from one duty station to another. The visits were a week or two long if not frequent.

I think that what endeared him to me most as a child was the way he talked *to* me, instead of *at* or *down to* me. I believe that formed a more lasting bond between us than if he had given into the temptation to try and buy my love by taking me on a shopping spree in a toy store. I'm not saying that he never bought me anything. He did, but in moderation. That was his way, and I think it's a good one.

One of his most famous exploits, that was to affect our family a great deal, began when he purchased a used army barracks from the government after World War II. He had it moved to a small town not far from where he had given up share-cropping. He converted one half of the barracks into a very comfortable three-bedroom residence, and the other half into the only country store for several miles around. For many years thereafter he would get up at 5 a.m. and open the store at 6 a.m. so my grandmother could sleep late. When she came to the store to relieve him at nine a.m. he would go to work in nearby Dothan, Alabama, selling furniture. When he got off work at 5 p.m. he would then relieve my grandmother at the store and close it down at 9 p.m. This was just his normal 16-hour day, and he thought nothing of it.

My most vivid childhood memories of him revolve around the store. When I was there, I always asked him to wake me up at 5 a.m., so that I could go and open

the store with him, and he always did. I would sit on top of the toilet tank and talk to him while he shaved. Then we would go into the kitchen and feast on cold cereal and bananas with Special K for him and Frosted Flakes for me. I don't remember what we talked about. I just remember that when I talked he really listened. And when he spoke to me it was as if he were speaking to another adult or a good friend. In my little boy's mind I thought that things would always be this way. And that is the way that I will always remember him. He was always so easy-going. I never recall ever seeing him get mad and I never heard him raise his voice at anyone. Everyone I know that knew him liked him.

He was not a man who commanded respect from his children or anyone else; it was freely given. Even after my father and his siblings had grandchildren of their own, they answered their father with, "Yes sir," "No sir" or just "Yes, Daddy," not because they had to. It was just out of the deep respect they had for the man, a respect that I gladly inherited.

I visited my grandfather the summer that I turned 14. This visit was different in many respects. Not only was I three years older than I was the last time he had seen me, there had also been some changes in my family. My parents had gotten divorced, my father had remarried and we arrived on that summer day with my new step-mother and four new step-siblings.

Not only had my family situation changed. I had changed, as boys tend to do about that age. I was feeling the pain, bliss and confusion that come from experimenting with alcohol, marijuana and girls, not necessarily in that order. I was too naive to realize how messed up I really was. I thought I was a real "man of the world." In reality, I wasn't even a man of the county yet.

When I saw my grandfather come out onto his front porch to

meet us, it was, for that moment at least, as if nothing had changed. I ran up and hugged his neck. He remarked on how tall I had gotten and kidded me good naturedly about the length of my hair. I then had to step back and allow him to greet my father and meet my newly acquired step-people. For a brief moment, during the introductions, our eyes met across that vast gulf of lost years and broken homes and we knew that things would never be the same between us again. Of course, in the age-old tradition of manhood, we never batted an eye, shed a tear or even mentioned it, either then, later or ever.

During that visit we did have a chance to have some good talks. We talked about Special K, Frosted Flakes and banana breakfasts that he had with some other child, about a hundred years ago. We talked about the improvements he had made to the store and about the length of my hair. He accepted it much better than my father, the career military man, did.

He told my dad, "Well, Sam, I think it's too long, too, but I see um in Dothan ever day with longer hair than his."

My father did not raise the subject again during that visit.

After that visit, I only saw my grandfather two or three more times. There were brief visits, when he came to Texas to see my father, but I was usually much too involved with the business of my life. It was a business that many people at that time would have said was a losing proposition.

By the time I was 30 years old, to make a long, depressing story short, I had gotten married, had children, made a lot of money, lost all the money and then some, gotten divorced and become extremely disillusioned with life and myself. I was working the night shift at a large factory. One night I received a message to call my father as soon as possible. He told me that my grandfather had died. He said

that it was a blessing because he had been suffering for a long time and had even become abusive and violent in his last days. I believed him, but still could not imagine the man that I had known as my grandfather being abusive, much less violent. However, I took the news as I was supposed to. I went back to work and finished my shift.

When I got off work, early the next morning, I went home to my one bedroom apartment that I shared with myself. After mixing a stiff drink, I took out my old photographs. I found one of those old black and white photos with

the white border around it and the date July 60 encoded in the border. It was a picture of a one-year-old me, standing in a playpen. I was smiling out at a much younger PaPa. He wasn't looking at the camera. He was talking to me.

As I studied this scene, . . . frozen in time 30 years before, it reminded me of one of those family stories that is repeated over the years. It was about how, when I was about the age I was in the picture, PaPa was left in charge of me for an afternoon. When my mother returned, she found my grandfather seated in a lawn chair in the back-

yard, leisurely reading a newspaper. I, clad only in a diaper and sneakers, gleefully explored the neighbor's backyard.

My mother was rather annoyed to say the least. She said as politely as possible, "I thought you were going to watch your grandson for me."

He calmly replied, "I *am* watchin' 'im. Yonder he goes."

At this memory from that much simpler time I began to laugh. The laughter turned to tears . . . for PaPa, for me, for us all.

Hidden Dependable

by Melanie Dobbs

Oh dangerous day, oh nonchalant night
I awake in fear and live through fright.
The courage of my youth sizzles with the fuse
and the sometimes rainbow at my refusal doth muse.
He smiles at me, though in his own backwards way
He yearns for me no longer to delay.
The night shields the sun and the day the moon
Where does the rainbow hide in this land of doom?
Where is his refuge, in the sweet summer rain?
Has the sentence been shortened, have they broken the chains?
Can I escape with him and only rarely appear?
Could I guide and direct him, could I even steer?
I have the compass in all its futility—
Make me like you, I desire humility.

The Have-Nots

by DeAnna Hargrove

The poor child asked, "How does that fancy thing work?

That's something my folks can't afford."

The rich child said, "I know, but I can't remember.

Quit using it when I got bored."

The poor teen said, "This is my library card.

After work, I go there for an hour."

The rich teen said, "We keep our books on a shelf
as a sign of prestige, wealth and power."

The poor adult said, "Soon, I'll have my degree
and I'll build my career on commitment."

The rich adult said, "I shall purchase a hobby
to relieve my spare time and resentment."

The poor parent said, to the babe in the bed,
"Dream your dreams . . . for, someday they will lead you."

The rich parent said, "You'd be better off dead
than to cope in a world that won't need you."

The poor child asked, "How does that fancy thing work?

That's something my folks can't afford."

The rich child said, "I know, but I can't remember.

Quit using it when I got bored."

Pipper

by Mary Ann Clay

He traveled across sixteen hundred miles
and stayed nearly seventeen years.

He only disappeared once, for three long days.
Forever after that he would hide under the bed
when the garbage truck came.

We moved him nine times in those year,
the proverbial number of his lives.

On each move-in day he would sniff all his humans' belongings.
Then he would find his litter box and, once again,
know he was home.

He died on the patio of his ninth home
in a makeshift cardboard bed.

It had a heating pad to warm his old bones.
A fluffy towel softened his final resting place
and he purred gratefully to the very end.

There are traces of him still, on an old black blouse
that hasn't been worn in years.

His pictures still hang on the wall and I talk to him
each time I pass by.

He travels no more, except in my heart.

What I Can Do

by Scott Craig

When I was just a baby,
I only did baby things.
I didn't do teenage things,
Because that's not what I could do.

When I was just a teenager,
I only did teenager things.
I didn't do middle-age
people things,
Because that's not what I could do.

When I was just a middle-aged
person,
I only did middle-age
people things.
I didn't do old people things,
Because that's not what I could do.

But when I became an old person,
I didn't want to do old
people things.
I tried to do baby things,
Because that's what I wanted to do.

The End

by Mark Annett

As the film goes on
So does the life of the actor,
But soon both will end.

Passages in life:
Though hard, they prove our mettle.
We'll be stronger now.

by Jeremy Coe



FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT by Stacy Cunningham

I Had A Drowning Friend

by Keith Mathis

I had a friend
He told me of things I'd known
of marriages that were gone
that left children hanging on
and the sound of small
 hearts breaking
finally broke the hearts of stone
but the smaller hearts, they mended
They were stronger than
 they'd thought
and they could live in peace
where larger hearts still fought

I had a friend
He told me of things I'd known
of loved ones in strange places
lying straight and stiff and cold
with their strange, familiar faces
in boxes, handles gold

I had a friend
and grief had known his name
I tried my best to console him
but he would never be the same
“My friend,” I said, “Don’t leave
me,
for I have known your pain
of loved ones that you’ll
 see no more,
and love to never be again”
“Granite and cold earth,” I said,
“are cold comforts, this I know
but the spirit of your brother
comes with every falling snow.
It won’t replace the laughter
or the hugs or dry your tears,
But just knowing they are there will
bring you comfort through
 the years”

I knew a man
and a bottle was his friend
It brought him up
and brought him down
and it became his end.

Emily's Words Ring True

by Melanie Dobbs

The tempest shied away from me
that cruel unfeeling storm
And though I still feel empty
I'm not too terribly worn.
That feathered thing Hope
still perches in my soul
So patiently I will watch
February winter its snow.

Passing Love's Sonnet

by Merrill O. Cantrell

What is this thing that we call love,
Is it a spirit bright and free,
Is it a chain that binds us strong,
That welds a bond between us two.
How can this thing that we
call love,
Span twenty years and twenty more,
And still be fresh within our hearts,
As on the day that we first met.
Oh yes, the hour that first we saw,
The light of love in eyes so true,
A slender strand wound soul
to soul,
A fragile strand that one
could break,
Yet o'er the years we added strands,
To weave a cord that'll never part.

...no moment to moment...
in and out and in...
out and out...in
beginning and no end...in

ETERNAL PASSAGES by Sarah Bennett

Circles

by Emmitt Hall

We come together in the light
to celebrate dawn's first glimmer,
Hands held round the glow
the sun rises,
lights our lives,
and we rejoice.
We gather again at noon,
stand proud, stand tall
stand round with awe,
and we dream,
for there are so many things . . .
. . . possible.
We come together at dusk,
to form a circle around
the fledging candlelight,
with hands we build a wall of hope
and we pray . . .
And in the darkness
we form one last circle,
and look down into the darkness,
deep into ourselves,
and
we
remember . . .



UNTITLED by Lee Maxwell



